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"Thackeray's Treatment of Female Characters"

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"THACKERAY'S TREATMENT OF FEMALE CHARACTERS"

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"THACKERAY'S TREATMENT OF FEMALE CHARACTERS"

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Ida F. Mitchell

Prairie View, Texas

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DEDICATION

To my kind and most understanding mother, Mrs. Clara Carter, 735 N. Commerce Street, Corsicana, Texas.

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INTRODUCTION

That William Makepeace Thackeray is a master of character delineation has long been recognized. Thackeray has created many characters we accept as wholly true to life. The people he has created have that quality of aliveness which makes them easily remembered. They are living speaking personalities; people that can be seen, that compel and linger, persons just like those known the world over.

A study of these novels reveals that Thackeray is pre-eminently a novelist of character. That Thackeray was interested in the female sex is evident by the multiplicity of females in his novels.

One wonders if a novelist can be called "truly great" if he does not have great characterizations such as Thackeray's Blanche Amory, Becky Sharp, Amelia Sedley, or Beatrix Esmond.

Yet again we wonder, how he arrives at such great characterizations. Therefore the problem is to decide how and in what manner does William Makepeace Thackeray treat his women characters to make them the "truly great women" of Thackeray's novels.

This problem is a literary investigation of William Makepeace Thackeray's method of treating the female characters in three of his novels: Vanity Fair (1847-1848), Pendennis

(1848-1850), and Henry Esmond (1852).

This problem is significant because critics of Thackeray have bitterly attacked and many critics have defended his treatment of female characters. It is, therefore, significant that a study be made of Thackeray's methods to determine whether they are unique, and if so, what reason is there for their uniqueness.

It is admitted that a problem of this nature could be much more inclusive and could be developed in many areas because William Makepeace Thackeray was a newspaperman, poet, essayist, critic, as well as a novelist. As a novelist, he wrote five long novels: Vanity Fair (1847-1848), The History of Pendennis (1848-1850), The History of Henry Esmond (1852), The Newcomes (1853-1855), The Virginians (1857-1859), and three shorter ones: The Memories of Barry Lyndon, Lovel the Widower, and Dennis Duval. But, for the purpose of this investigation, Thackeray's treatment of female characters has been limited to the three long novels, which many critics have said is his masterpiece; The History of Henry Esmond, the novel that Anthony Trollope declared was "by far the best of Thackeray's novels"; and The History of Pendennis, the autobiographical novel acclaimed by some critics as his most intimate revelation of himself.

The writer having selected these novels, proposes to give a critical analysis of William Makepeace Thackeray's treatment of female characters in the novels (Vanity Fair, Henry Esmond and Pendennis) supporting with evidence the hypothesis that: the women he treated and the manner in which he treated them were influenced by the geographical setting in which the author wrote, the historical background of the age in which he lived, and his immediate environment.

It is assumed that: Thackeray wrote during a period and for a society created by the Industrial Revolution; that the characters he treated were products of this society; that Thackeray felt a novelist's responsibility to his reading public; and that his female characters were treated in a manner to please his readers and to adhere to Victorian restrictions on literature.

It is also assumed that Thackeray's personal unhappiness and his philosophies of life are reflected in his treatment of female characters.

For the purpose of this study the term treatment is extended to mean the author's method of controlling the speech and actions of the characters. Speech refers to the author's method of making known the conversations and expression of thoughts of the characters. The term actions refers to the author's method of making known the conduct and behavior of the characters. Characters are the members of the female sex appearing in the novels, Vanity Fair, Pendennis, and Henry Esmond.

In a literary study of this kind, the writer uses the library facilities available. In this investigation, the libraries used were the W. R. Banks Library, Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College, Prairie View, Texas and the University of Texas Library, Austin, Texas.

The writer consulted bibliographical indexes to locate reference materials; read and analyzed critically the research literature in the field of inquiry and framed a tentative bibliography.

After an analysis of the data and the framing of the bibliography, the writer evaluated the material to determine its validity and pertinence to the problem. Primary source materials were given priority.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES

A work of fiction contains three elements of potential interest, namely, the characters, the plot, and the setting.[1] For this study, particular emphasis is being placed on one specific element, characters. To understand Thackeray's characters, "it becomes a matter of importance to know what manner of man Thackeray was, since the right understanding of his work is impossible without the right understanding of the man."[2]

Because of Thackeray's injunction to his older daughter that no biography be written of his life, there is no complete biography written. However, Thackeray's daughter was constrained by the misinformation about her father to relax the restriction he had placed upon her and she released a small part of his correspondence. From this correspondence and other legal records much is known of Thackeray's life.

William Makepeace Thackeray was born at Calcutta, July 18, 1811. His parents were Anne Becher Thackeray and Richmond Thackeray, an official of the East India Company. Richmond Thackeray

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[1]Bliss Perry, A Study of Prose Fiction, Rev. ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), p. 95.

[2]W. J. Dawson, The Makers of English Fiction, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1950), p. 77.

died at the age of thirty-three, leaving a widow of twenty-three, a young son of four, and a considerable fortune.

As was the custom of English parents living in India, Thackeray was sent to England to receive his education. On arriving in England, he lived with his father's sister, Mrs. John Ritchie, from whose house on February 12, 1818, he wrote his first recorded letter to his "Mama", and to Captain Carmichael Smyth, her second husband.[3] This letter gives the first clue to the desire of a little boy to see his mother. Thackeray wrote: "I hope Captain is well. Give my love to him and tell him he must bring you home to your affectionate little son."[4]

He loved his mother very much and wrote to her often. It was she who, with her sympathy and understanding, encouraged him to confide his thoughts and impressions to feminine ears, with the result that he ever resorted to his pen to unburden his emotions.[5]

Thackeray's formal education was begun in Chiswich, and from there he went to the Charterhouse School. Here he received his first impression of brutality. At the time of Thackeray's entrance in the school, Dr. Russell, the schoolmaster was trying

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3Gordon N. Ray, The Letters of William Makepeace Thackeray, ed. Vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. XVIII.

4Ibid., p. 3.

5Malcolm Elwin, Thackeray, A Personality (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), p. 25.

his great experiment of offering education at a very cheap rate. Far more pupils were accepted than could be comfortably accommodated, and the natural result was overcrowded classrooms and packed boarding houses. Fagging had been restricted as a practice of the school, but these restrictions only increased the brutality. The boys fought and punished each other within the confines of their rooms and out of the sight of their superiors.[6]

Thackeray did not complain of the brutality of his classmates, but of his master he wrote often. It was of Dr. Russell that he wrote his first recorded parody. To his mother, he wrote: "Dr. Russell is most vehemently vociferous at present."

> So have I seen an African arid shore
> A hungry lion give a mighty roar,
> That mighty roar echoed along the shore
> And another Lion (that's I) thinks the
> first (that's Russell) a bore.[7]

His tenure at Charterhouse was six years, during which time, he often wrote to his mother of Dr. Russell's wrath. "Dr. Russell is treating me every day with such manifest unkindness and injustice, that I really can scarcely bear it."[8] Thackeray's desire to leave school is expressed in this way:

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[6]Lewis Melville, The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray, Vol. I. (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1899), p. 16.

[7]Letters, op. cit., p. 15.

[8]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

"There are but 370 in the school, I wish there were only 369."[9]

Thackeray's dislike for Dr. Russell softened as he grew older. He often returned to the school for visits and to attend annual celebrations. "In many of his books Thackeray has mentioned the school, and young Rawdon Crowley, Pendennis ... and many other 'living' characters who spent their boyhood there."[10]

In 1828, Thackeray entered Trinity College in Cambridge and resolved to become a better student, but soon found himself spending much of his time reading and entertaining his friends. The remaining hours were spent in walks through the woods, visiting museums, and sketching. He remained at the university for two years, distinguishing himself only as a contributor to a publication called The Snob, a satirical journal.

Thackeray's college life was enjoyable; it brought him congenial friendships and widened his perception of character, but he soon realized that his writings and sketchings were nothing more than a means of entertaining his friends. He decided, therefore, that if his talent was to depict human nature as he saw it, it could be observed far more richly anywhere else than within college walls. With these considerations in mind, Thackeray decided to leave Cambridge.[11]

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[9] Ibid., p. 25.

[10] Melville, op. cit., p. 36.

[11] Lionel Stevenson, The Showman of Vanity Fair: The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), pp. 30-32.

He traveled on the continent, wandering through Europe, visiting Dresden, Rome, Paris, and Weimar, sketching picturesque natives, flirting, attending the theaters, and enjoying the amusements of court life.

> He was living the carefree life of a good-natured, high-spirited young man .....but drinking in all the time those scenes and characters which were to appear later in the novels. The education of a novelist was proceeding outside of academic cloisters.[12]

In reply to a query from his mother concerning the people with whom he was associating in Weimar, Thackeray wrote:

> You ask me to give you an account of the people with whom I am associating, the less I say the better (that is of the Mistress of the house), for she has been detected in cheating one Englishman and would have done the same by another serv't if she could.[13]

Of the old ladies he said, "The old ladies here seem to be bent on marrying their daughters; two have told me they did not wish much money. As the respectable dowagers find they can make nothing of me, they almost cut me."[14]

While in Weimar, he met Van Goethe, the great German poet, and subsequently contributed poems to Van Goethe's weekly literary

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[12]John W. Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 8.

[13]Letters, op. cit., p. 129.

[14]Ibid., p. 135.

magazine, Chaos. He spent several evenings in the home of the Van Geothes reading novels and poems and drawing caricatures for his children.

Upon receiving a critical letter from his mother concerning his manner of living, Thackeray replied that his life was "not idleness, irresolution, and extravagance" here as much as in England because here he had "more inducement to industry and less to expense." He saw little use studying what could be of no use to him. In his letter Thackeray continued: "For ten years of my life I was at school; it was thought that this discipline of misery was necessary to improve and instruct me." Thackeray makes a plea, ... "All my purpose in it is to beg and entreat you not to form wishes for my entering on pursuits which if you thought as I do you would think it my duty to avoid." He regrets, "I wish to God that I could so alter my feelings .... but I cannot smother them, I cannot alter them ..... though I have struggled long."[15]

Mrs. Carmichael Smyth's criticism of Thackeray encouraged him to return to England to study for the bar. But as everything else Thackeray had tried, studying for the bar was "one of the most cold-blooded, prejudiced pieces of invention that ever a man was slave to."[16] To amuse himself he began reading

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[15]Letters, op. cit., pp. 138-139.

[16]Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, The Dictionary of National Biography, eds. Vol. XIX (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 573.

novels, strolling out to look at the world, gambling, discussing poetry with his friends, usually Charles Buller, and attending parties.

After a night with friends at the theater, Thackeray and his associates visited London taverns "where young bloods rubbed elbows with a raffish crowd of reporters and hack writers and shabby hangers-on of questionable repute."[17] Here Thackeray became acquainted with the profession of letters on its seamiest side; he also met its overlord William Magnin. Magnin was engaged in a literary war against Bulwer Lytton, editor of the New Monthly Magazine. Thus, Thackeray's services were enlisted, because he had exhibited a gift for burlesque. Magnin introduced him to the secrets of journalism, the Magnin kind.[18] Thackeray was greatly impressed; consequently, he thought of discontinuing his studies for the bar.

At the age of twenty-one, his opportunity arrived; he received his inheritance. He at once gave up his idea of studying for the bar and returned to France.

> ..... To Harve first, on his way to Paris ..... Here he stayed some months, learning the language, goint into society, reading and criticizing what he read, drawing too, and frequenting the theatres as a

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[17]Stevenson, op. cit., pp. 45-47.

[18]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 47.

matter of course.[19]

He soon lost his fortune, partly by gambling and speculation, partly by an unwise investment in a newspaper, the National Standard, and the failure of a Calcutta Bank. "In a sense, it was a relief to lose his fortune for with it went the means to indulge his taste for idleness and dissipation."[20]

After the failure of the newspaper, Thackeray returned to Paris to study art. Within a year, he began to realize that he would not become a competent painter. He wrote to Frank Stone a well known painter, these words which express his discouragement with this artistic experiment.

> ..... As for myself -- I am in a state of despair -- I have got enough torn up pictures to roast an ox by -- I have become lately so disgusted with myself and art and everything belonging to it, that for a month past, I have been lying on sofas reading novels and never touching a pencil. In these six months, I have not done a thing worth looking at. O God when will Thy light enable my fingers to work, and my colours shine? If in another six months, I can do no better, I will arise and go out and hang myself.[21]

Thackeray's work did not improve, thus, he began to make plans for a new career. Since literature had provided him the first recognition that he had received, Thackeray turned to literature.

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[19]Melville, op. cit., p. 73.

[20]Gordon N. Ray, The Buried Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 17.

[21]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 63.

He applied for a job as illustrator for Dickens, but the job was refused him. In the meantime, he had fallen in love with a beautiful, "nice, simple, girlish girl", Isabella Shawe. Isabella's mother being a typical mother of the time, objected to the match. Mrs. Shawe, the matchmaking mama of a marriageable daughter, was searching for a better prospect. However, Thackeray's stepfather solved this problem by becoming a famous publisher of a newspaper, The Constitutional.

Thackeray became Paris correspondent for The Constitutional and now having a regular salary with which to support a wife, he married Isabella Shawe.[22]

The Constitutional suffered the same fate as The National Standard; it collapsed after eighteen months of publication, on the same day that Thackeray's first daughter was born. With its collapse, his occupation was gone and he faced the necessity of earning a living by any means. "On the day that the slim and shy young Princess Victoria found herself called to ascend a throne, William Makepeace Thackeray had found himself unwillingly compelled to become a professional author."[23]

Luckily for Thackeray, journalism was flourishing in England. New types of magazines and newspapers that boasted of book

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[22]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 63.

[23]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 69.

reviews and short, humorous articles were gaining popularity. Young men with ideas were welcomed. The most successful paper in London at this time was the Times to which Thackeray began contributing.

Creditable work with the Times gave Thackeray a favorable reputation which enabled him to contribute articles to Punch and Frazer's Magazine. He wrote anonymously or under assumed signatures such as Michael Angelo Titmarch, George Fitz-Boodle, Charles James Fitzroy Yellowplush, and others. For ten years, and more he wrote biography, reminiscences, tales, satires, critical essays, verses, and book reviews. As Thackeray had received a gentlemen's education, Stevenson accounts for the anonymous names in this way: "Subconsciously perhaps, he was influenced by the old prejudice that authorship was not a gentleman's game.[24]

Among Thackeray's first assignments for Frazers were the Yellowplush Papers in which he satirized the pretensions of social climbers. This was followed by Catherine, a satire of the crime element in fiction. Thackeray continued his scathing attacks for Frazers and later for Punch. The most important articles for Punch satirized social pretentiousness; they were later republished as The Book of Snobs.

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[24]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 73.

In March 1839, Thackeray's second daughter, who had been born nine months earlier, died. The following year their third daughter was born and Mrs. Thackeray became gravely ill. Thackeray his literary career firmly launched, was busy writing, traveling, trying to earn a living and did not notice that Isabella's condition was steadily growing worse. On returning from a trip to Belgium to do a periodical for Blackwood's Magazine, Thackeray found Isabella in a severe state of depression. He then decided to take her on a vacation to relieve her mental strain. After the vacation she showed no improvement.

Thackeray, believing that his preoccupation with his work had caused her condition, continued to seek a means of restoring her health. Undaunted by his previous failure, he took her to visit her mother, hoping that familiar surroundings would improve her mental state. Mrs. Shawe refused to assume the responsibility of taking care of Isabella; she reporached Thackeray for having caused her condition. From Mrs. Shawe's home, he carried his family to Paris where his mother gave them the home that his mother-in-law had refused them.

This was a time of great despair for Thackeray. He could not write; he had little money; and his wife was incurably insane.

> The heart-sick despair of the months
> of wretchedness through which Thackeray
> passed in the fall and winter of 1840-1841

> profoundly altered his cast of mind. He learned much from suffering. He could now stand apart from himself, observing his own feelings and piercing to their motives as he never had in the past ..... Thackeray's new self-knowledge brought with it a new understanding and tolerance of others. It was thus that the ground work was laid for the sad, penetrating vision that distinguishes his great novels.[25]

He blamed himself for all the sorrows and disappointments that had come to him.

While in the throes of despair, Thackeray was being discouraged everywhere. His appeals to his publishers for more money was refused. He wrote a volume containing The Second Funeral of Napoleon, which few people bought. The critics sneered at and severly criticized the volume. Thackeray suffered; he sought sympathy, but little was forthcoming. He became melancholy, much of which is expressed in his novels.

To relieve the financial strain, he borrowed money from his Cousin Mary, carried his wife to doctors; supervised her treatments until he realized that she was destined to remain insane. He then placed her in a private hospital near enough to Paris for him to visit her frequently.

Thackeray's primary sources of consolation were received from women.

> His mother's boundless affection during his troubles, and the unselfishness with

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[25]Ray, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

> which even obscure servant women looked after his wife and children, gave him a new respect for feminine character.[26]

With his wife permanently committed to the hospital and his children residing with his mother, Thackeray again became a frequentor of clubs. He was restless and became a wanderer. For three years (1843-1846), he had no definite place to live. He roamed over Ireland, Egypt and Paris, writing for niggardly sums.

> Only once during this period did Thackeray give full expression to his state of mind in a novel. This was Barry Lyndon, a story received with indifference or hostility by its first readers and later regarded with dislike by Thackeray himself.[27]

Not until 1846 did he attempt to settle down. His financial condition improved with the publication of The Snobs of England. He then re-established his home in London because he felt a father's responsibility was to maintain a home for his children.

The following year, Thackeray's great triumph came with the publication of the first number of Vanity Fair, in January, 1847. Other masterpieces followed: Pendennis (1848-1850) and Henry Esmond (1852).

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[26]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 102.

[27]Ray, op. cit., p. 30.

Thackeray was now a famous novelist, but he continued to rely on women for encouragement. The most promising of these ladies was Mrs. Brookfield, the wife of a friend. He wrote to her as he had to his mother; he wrote her daily journals.

Malcolm Elwin accounts for Thackeray's special interest in Mrs. Brookfield:

> He craved communion with a woman of his own generation, of hiw own habit of life, who could appreciate his problems and realize his point of view. He wanted that which a wife only can give with complete satisfaction, for he represented intrinsically a masculine type of man of whom a woman is the natural complement.[28]

William Brookfield became jealous of Thackeray's attentions to his wife; their friendship was greatly altered; although not terminated. Mrs. Brookfield, acting according to her husband's wishes, asked Thackeray to stay away from her and to limit his correspondence. This was another great disillusionment. His life, in the main, was a series of disappointments and disillusionments.

He traveled to America as a lecturer; presented himself as a candidate for Parliament and was defeated. All of these activities he engaged in while his health was steadily declining.

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[28]Elwin, op. cit., p. 198.

In 1860, he became editor of the Coonhill Magazine and served in this position for two years. He retired in 1862 with a sizeable fortune.

He began writing Dennis Duval, a novel which was partially completed. His attacks were occuring more frequently now and writing was a tiring occupation. During the period when Thackeray had most of his wishes fulfilled, he had financial security, a growing popularity as a novelist, love of family and friends, and contentment. He died suddenly on Christmas Eve, 1863, at the age of fifty-two.

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[29]Elwin, op. cit., p. 199.

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND OF THACKERAY'S FEMALE CHARACTERS

Critics vary greatly in their consideration of the sources from which Thackeray's female characters were drawn. Ernest Baker, the renowned scholar of the English novel believed that Thackeray's "most real and telling figures are those who come out of his brain."[1] Gordon N. Ray devoted a major portion of his scholarly publication, The Buried Life to the study of sililarities between Thackeray's female characters and the women with whom he was acquainted.[2] Lewis Melville stated that although Thackeray's characters may not be classified as prototypes "as in the case of all writers, he must, though perhaps unconsciously have received suggestions from persons with whom he was acquainted."[3]

Thus, being cognizant of these diverse opinions, the sources of Thackeray's female characters will be studied from the three sources which are a recourse for any novelist:

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[1]Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, Vol. VII. "The Age of Dickens and Thackeray" (London: H. F. and G. Witherby LTD, 1936), p. 364.

[2]Gordon N. Ray, The Buried Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), Chapter II.

[3]Lewis Melville, Some Aspects of Thackeray (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1913), p. 141.

observation, history, imagination and invention.

Certainly an author having had the cosmopolitan background of Thackeray and the many varied experiences: wealth and poverty, happiness and extreme mental anguish; associations with the gentlemen and the Bohemians; a life of leisure and one of bare existence was equipped to observe humanity. These experiences gave him a unique power of observation which he transferred into the creation of his characters. His daughter wrote: "Although he always said he never consciously copied anybody. It was of course impossible that suggestions did not come to him."[4]

Helen Pendennis, Payne, Laura Bell, Miss Crawley, Amelia Sedley, and Miss Fotheringay are alluded to have been people whom Thackeray once knew.[5]

Malcolm Elwin believed that Thackeray's mother influenced the portrayal of his heroines. He wrote:

> In none of the novelist's heroines
> was there absent some suggestion of
> his childhood's idol and in Helen
> Pendennis there is an attempt to portray
> her as she appeared to him in his youth.[6]

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[4]Gordon N. Ray, The Letters of William Makepeace Thackeray, ed. Vol. I. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. CIIX.

[5]Isadore Gilbert Mudge and M. Earl Sears, A Thackeray Dictionary (London: George Routledge and Sons LTD, 1910), p. 301.

[6]Malcolm Elwin, Thackeray, A Personality (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), p. 25.

Thackeray admitted having used the name of Mrs. Brookfield's maid in Vanity Fair. In a letter to Mrs. Brookfield, Thackeray apologized:

> Now that it is over and irremedial, I am thinking with a sort of horror of a bad joke in the last number of Vanity Fair, which may perhaps annoy somebody whom I wouldn't wish to displease. Amelia is represented as having a lady's maid, and the lady's maid's name is Payne ..... The only way will be for you I fear is to change Payne's name to her christian one. Pray do not be angry if you are and forgive me if I have offended.[7]

Thackeray's Laura Bell was believed to have been Mary "Polly" Graham, Thackeray's adopted sister, spoken of in Pendennis as a beautiful girl and besides her beauty she has goodness, modesty and common sense.[8] However, upon observing her as a woman, she appeared to Thackeray as "a garrulous, flirtatious, grass widow," whose changed personality was similar to that of Blanche Amory. Even "Becky" he wrote, "is a trifle to her."[9]

There is also the prevailing belief that Mrs. Butler, Thackeray's maternal grandmother inspired his portrayal of

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[7]William M. Thackeray, The History of Pendennis (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1920), p. 202.

[8]Lionel Stevenson, The Showman of Vanity Fair: The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 186.

[9]Gordon N. Ray, Introduction to The Letters of William Makepeace Thackeray, Vol. I. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), P. CX.

Miss Crawley.

> It may be surmised that Thackeray did not go far afield for his model when he drew old Miss Crawley in Vanity Fair. Living with him was his maternal grandmother, Harriett Butler, a selfish and imperious old lady to the worldy follies of whose youth had succeeded beads and prayer books as appropriate toys of age.[10]

Thackeray denied that Amelia was copied after Mrs. Brookfield. In a letter to her Cousin Harry Hallman in October, 1847, Mrs. Brookfield stated that Thackeray told William Brookfield that Amelia was not a copy of her but, "he could not have conceived the character had he not known her."[11]

Perhaps it is coincidental that Thackeray used the name Amelia in his novel, Vanity Fair, when he believed that Mr. Fielding's Amelia was "the most delightful portrait of a woman that furely ever was penned."[12] However, the name, Amelia is believed to have been taken from that of his grandmother, Amelia Richmond-Webb. "He gave his grandmother's name, Amelia to the lady whom he intended to be the purest of his early female creations."[13]

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[10]Ibid., pp. CV-CVI.

[11]Elwin, op. cit., p. 194.

[12]Lewis Melville, Some Aspects of Thackeray (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1913), p. 43.

[13]Sir William Hunter, The Thackerays in India: and Some Calcutta Groves (London: Henry Frowde, 1897), p. 179.

In a letter to his mother in 1849, Thackeray reported his activities in Paris. These included a night at the theater, where he was received by an actress in a yellow satin drawing room. He wrote: "……I shall pop her and her boudoir into a book someday….." Included in the female characters in Pendennis is Miss Fatheringay, an actress.

According to Bliss Perry, a great deal of the material of the novelist comes to him from what he hears in his conversation or reads in books.[15] This was partly true of Thackeray for he was an avid reader of books. Thackeray's appetite for reading seems to have developed when he was very young. "As a boy, Thackeray was fond of books and at Cambridge he was an omnivorous reader, principally, however, of fiction, poetry, and history.[16]

Thackeray's interest in history may be traced from the days he spent in the Charterhouse School. Here he purchased Murray's Life of Napoleon and thought it "a very nice little book indeed."[17] Later according to him, his taste for mathematics did not increase but "my taste for old books and prints much."[18]

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[15]Bliss Perry, A Study of Prose Fiction, Rev. ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920),p. 97.

[16]Melville, op. cit., p. 23.

[17]Letters, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 84.

[18]Ibid., p. 82.

As late as his writing of the fragmentary novel, Dennis Duval, the historical romance of the fifteenth century, Thackeray relied on history for his novels; however, he did not select his female characters directly from a past era, in the main. One female, Queen Anne, was directly taken from the eighteenth century.

Important, however, for the female characters is the atmosphere of the century, in which they were placed and the events which they participated. In Vanity Fair, none of the female characters are present at the Battle of Waterloo, but the sounds of the battle are heard in the distance and "the streams of wounded come back from the battle which means so much in the lives and fortunes of the people we know."[19]

Included in Thackeray's summer reading program, the year that he left Cambridge, was the new form of Waverly Novels, which he had ordered; however, according to Leslie Stevenson, Thackeray had begun his reading of these novels along with other works of fiction in the Charterhouse School.

Stevenson states:

> He would pile up his desk with Latin and Greek texts and then behind their shelter read the Waverly novels, or

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[19]Dodds, op. cit., p. 112.

Peregrive Pickle, or preferably
Pierce Egan's lively masterpiece,
Life in London .....[20]

Evidence does not support the statement that Thackeray's interest in reading novels enabled him to create his female characters. But, a logical assumption may be made that Thackeray's female characterizations were influenced by the novels he read. "When he read Bulwer's Eugene Aram, he felt sure that he would be able to produce a better novel."[21]

As an older man, Thackeray gave critical reviews for magazines and newspapers. He attacked feriously those writers who advocated pretensions, intolerance, social climbing, or snobbery in any form. From this period of reading, Thackeray did not select female characters, but his attitude toward the virtues and vices of females was entrenched. This attitude permeates his novels.

Evidence has been presented that some of Thackeray's females were originals or similar to the women Thackeray knew. There is also the prevailing opinion that most of his female characters were not drawn directly from the books that he read, but his characterizations were influenced by these books. With this evidence in mind, it is reasonable to assume that the

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[20]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 15.

[21]Ibid., p. 46.

remaining source from which these characters were drawn was the author's imagination and invention. He observed many people and from his observations, created innumerable characters. As a puppet master, he placed them upon the stage and watched them perform. He became so absorbed in his creations that even he, at a later date, was unable to recall having recorded their actions.

> I don't control my characters.....
> I am in their hands and they take me
> where they please ..... It seems as
> if an occult power was moving the pen...
> ...The personage does or says something
> and I ask, how the dickens did he come
> to think of that?[22]

So realistic were Thackeray's imaginative creations that during a trip to Brussels, Thackeray wrote a long letter to Mr. Brookfield in which he described his itinerary; he stated that he was going to the Hotel de la Terrasse where Becky used to live; he also planned to pass by Captain Osborne's lodging. "How curious it is", he wrote, "I believe perfectly in all those people and feel quite an interest in the inn in which they lived."[23]

Gordon Ray suggested that Thackeray's imagination allowed him to observe several persons, read about others and

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[22]Melville, Life, p. 114.

[23]A Collection of Letters, pp. 14-15.

form a composite picture of the group to produce one character. He wrote of the speculation that Becky was the prototype of one of Thackeray's female associates. Ray stated:

> The conclusion to which one is forced after examining the evidence available is that Becky had no single original, but shaped herself in Thackeray's mind from his observations of many women and his reading many books.[24]

Lewis Melville accounts for Becky in this way: Because of Thackeray's realistic characterization of Becky, Thackeray's associates often saw women that they believed to be her original. However, according to Melville, Thackeray, when questioned about the possibility of this being true, only laughed.

> A lady who knew him intimately was not so reticent. She said the character of Becky was an invention, but it had been suggested to him by a governess who lived in the neighborhood of Kensington Square.[25]

Irrespective of the sources from which Thackeray's female characters were drawn, these characters have even in the twentieth century, given us an enduring picture of English life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

When one takes a look at Thackeray's novels, there will be scenes, perhaps, which are too multitudious to remember because of the lack of knowledge of the eighteenth and

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[24]Letters, CIVii.

[25]Melville, Aspects, p. 152.

nineteenth century settings. There will be, perhaps, some incidents which will be forgotten. But, Thackeray's characters although numerous, will leave with the readers profound impressions.

These characters, although living in Thackeray's world of "upper-middle class London, focused in Russell Square, with occasional excursions to Gaunt House and the seamier side of the titular aristocracy" are composed of females in the upper-middle class, professional women, female servants and individuals who are not restricted to any particular group.[26]

Within the upper-middle class are matrons, dowagers, ladies and titled women. The matrons are the wives and mothers of the household whose primary functions are: to superintend their servants; love their children; attempt to please and obey their husbands; possess all of the womanly virtues: meekness, submissiveness, humility and sympathy. Beauty is an asset but not a requirement. The possibility of their being dull, jealous, or even selfish is always present.

Representative of the matrons in Vanity Fair is Lady Rose Crawley, Sir Pitt's second wife.

> The only endowments with which nature has gifted Lady Crawley were those of pink cheeks and a white skin, and she

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[26]John W. Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 123.

> had no sort of character, no talents, nor opinions, nor occupations, nor amusements, nor that vigor of soul and ferocity of temper which often falls to the lot of entirely foolish women.[27]

Helen Pendennis is a typical matron in Pendennis:

> ..... this lady moved through the world quite regardless of all the comments that were made in her praises or disfavor. She did not seem to know that she was admired or hated for being so perfect; but carried on calmly through life, saying her prayers, loving her family, helping her neighbors, and doing her duty.[28] Mrs. Pendennis had that vice which Miss Pybus and Miss Pierce discovered in her, namely, that of pride; which did not vest itself so much in her own person, as in that of her family.[29]

Rachel, the Lady from Castlewood appears as a matron in Henry Esmond. She is a lady of great beauty, married to a man who is her inferior. Her jealousy is reflected in her lack of sympathy for her daughter, Beatrix. In selecting her servants, she selects the old and unattractive. Esmond states:

> Comely servant-maids might come for hire, but none were taken at Castle-wood. The housekeeper was old; my

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[27]William M. Thackeray, Vanity Fair (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 80.

[28]William M. Thackeray, Pendennis (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, LTD, 1910), p. 14.

[29]Ibid., p. 15.

Lady's own waiting-woman squinted,
and was marked with the smallpox.[30]

The dowagers are the imperious women whose husbands have died, usually leaving them a small fortune. They are often the epitome of the idle upper-middle class whose leisure is spent in the most useless ways: discussing fashions, listening to gossip, enjoying tea parties, and exemplifying affectations.

In Vanity Fair, Old Miss Crawley describes the Dowager Southdown, Pitt Crawley's mother-in-law. Miss Crawley states, "She is stupid and pompous."[31]

Typical of the dowagers in Pendennis is Dowager Countess of Rockminister, a distant kinswoman of Helen Pendennis, an imperious but kindhearted old lady; she is fond of Laura Bell and takes charge of her after the death of Mrs. Penedennis. Her kind heart falters many times; especially, is this apparent to Dowager Rockminister's female companion "who had endured her mistress for forty years, and had been clawed and scolded and jibed every day and night in that space of time.[32]

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[30]William Makepeace Thackeray, Henry Esmond (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell N. D.), p. 59.

[31]Vanity Fair, p. 346.

[32]Pendennis, p. 294.

Viscountess Isabel Castlewood, the Dowager Castlewood in Henry Esmond even in her old age:

> Her face was illuminated with vermillion, which appeared the very brightest from the white paint used to set it off. She wore the ringlets which had been the fashion of King Charles time. Her eyes gleamed out from amidst of this queer structure of paint, dyes, and pomatums.[33]

The young ladies, the husband seeking kind, are usually the attractions around whom the stories evolve. They are, for the most part, beautiful with many vices. They are neither good nor bad. Some are clinging vines as in the case of Amelia Sedley in Vanity Fair.

"She had such a kindly, smiling, tender, gentle, generous heart of her own, as won the love of everybody who came near her."[34] However, "her nose was rather short than otherwise and her cheeks a great deal too round for a heroine.[35]

Blanche Amory, christened Betoy, is Lady Claverings' daughter by her first marriage.

> Blanche was fair and like a sylph.[36]
> ..... this young lady was not able to carry out any emotion to the full;

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[33]Henry Esmond, p. 229.

[34]Vanity Fair, p. 4.

[35]Ibid., p. 4.

[36]Pendennis, Vol. I. p. 233.

> but had a sham enthusiasm, a sham hatred, a sham love, a sham taste, a sham grief, each of which flared and shone very vehemently for an instant, but subsided and gave place to the next sham emotion.[37]

Beatrix Esmond, the daughter of Lady Castlewood in Henry Esmond:

> Has a brown beauty.... and whose motion, whether rapid or slow, was always perfect grace-aigle as a nymph, lofty as a queen -- now melting, now sarcastic -- there was no single movement of hers but was beautiful.[38]

Too much education for these young women is unbecoming as their most important function is to marry and many men of this age abhorred the educated women. These young ladies who have more good qualities than bad are often plain and slightly unattractive; the glamourous ladies often possess more immoral tendencies than moral ones.

Thackeray's women who claim titles are countesses whose only claims to fame are their titles. They are, for the most part, snobs, whose titles compel them to feel superior to women of the lower class. Among this group, too, are those women whose moral convictions are not always Victorian.

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[37] Ibid., p. 364.

[38] Henry Esmond, p. 267.

Thackeray's titled women include three countesses in Vanity Fair. The poor but proud wife of the Earl of Bareacres is the Countess of Bareacres. In Brussels at the Battle of Waterloo, she snubs Becky Sharp, but condescents and offers Becky social favors when she needs Becky's horses to escape from the city.[39]

Countess Belladonna is the beautiful Italian Countess to whom Lord Steyne turned after Becky's downfall.[40]

The third countess is the Countess of Slingstone, a censorious lady of fashion without whom the exclusive guest lists were incomplete.[41]

Thackeray's second group of women are the professional women. Of this group, an actress and a governess are carefully delineated. Both are forceful personalities. Included in this group is a teacher who causes Rebecca Sharp to reveal her personality.

Carefully delineated is Miss Fotheringay, the actress in Pendennis. Miss Fotheringay

> ..... was the tallest of women,
> and at her age of six and twenty
> for six and twenty she was, though
> she vows she was only nineteen .....

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[39]Vanity Fair, p. 324.

[40]Ibid., p. 683.

[41]Ibid., p. 523.

> ..... But it was her hand and arm that this magnificent creature excelled in, and somehow you could see her but through them. They surrounded her. When she folded them in resignation; when she dropped them in mute agony, or raised them in superb command.[42]

Miss Rebecca Sharp is a most vividly characterized governess who later becomes Mrs. Rawdon in Vanity Fair.

> ..... was small and slight in person; pale, sandy-haired, and with eyes habitually cast down; when she looked up they were very large, odd and attractive. But she had never been a girl, she said, she had been a woman since she was eight years old.[43]

Rebecca is considered the bad heroine of Vanity Fair. She possesses much charm, wit, and tact but lacks a conscience or moral principle of any sort.

Miss Pinkerton is head of the seminary at Chaswick Mall, the school attended by Rebecca Sharp and Amelia Sedley. Upon leaving Miss Pinkerton's seminary, students were usually given Doctor Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, but the favorite dictionary is not given to Becky by the good natured Miss Pinkerton with her little red nose, because Becky was a charity student.

Thackeray's serving women are merely part of the milieu and function as fillers for the novels. Several, however,

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[42]Pendennis., pp. 37-38.

[43]Vanity Fair., p. 10.

poor to afford her services, "she secured not only her property but some of her mistress's".47

The final group is the family group, which presents a comprehensive picture of the English social structure: the landed aristocracy, the English gentry; the city merchants; and the bourgeoise of trade.

Old Miss Matilda Crawley of Vanity Fair, although, in neither of the previous groups is a masterly delineated old maid of the, English gentry. She is a worldly, humorous, irreligious old maid with a fortune.

> Old Miss Crawley was certainly one of the repobate. She had a snug little house in Park Lane, and as she ate and drank a great deal too much during the season in London, she went to Harrogate or Chelterham for the summer.48

Miss Crawley admired Rebecca for her wit and charm, but cut her favorite nephew, Rawdon Crawley, out of her will for marrying her. Becky only married Rawdon for his aunt's fortune and her social position of which Miss Crawley was aware.

47Ibid., p. 566.

48Ibid., p. 91.

CHAPTER III

THACKERAY'S METHODS OF TREATING FEMALE CHARACTERS

Thackeray's female characters are contemporary English people, predominantly middle class. They are unlike the characters of Charles Dickens with whom they are often compared. Dickens' characters live in the virtue of the characteristics in which they differ from other characters, while Thackeray's characters live in the virtue of the characteristics they share. Thackeray's range is not limited to types of human character as Dickens' range is, but it covers all the aspects of human nature implied in the title of one of his most characteristic books, Vanity Fair.[1]

Thackeray has been accused of creating static female characters that do not develop or deteriorate during the course of his books. Instead, critics say, there is a progressive revelation or unfolding of people whose dominant tendencies are fixed when they first appear. Dodds, in defense of Thackeray, states that within certain limits, this statement is true, as it must be in character novels of broad range because "the interest comes, not so much from inner growth or decay of individuals

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[1]David Cecil. Early Victorian Novelists (New York: The Boobs-Merrill Company, 1935), pp. 78-79.

as from the interplay between individuals and groups.[2]

Cecil also defends Thackeray by saying that in Dickens and Fielding, the readers concentrate on the fortunes of individuals living in the present and looking forward with anxiety, never looking back. But in Thackeray, "we stand farther back and are cognizant of the general curve of life, of the flight of time and change, of decay and renewal."[3]

The inevitable influence of years on characters, searing down love, slackening ambition, making faint memory itself appears on Thackeray's pages for the first time in the English Novel. Thackeray's characters live in time as well as space", writes Dodd, "and the mutation of character as it goes through the furnace of years approximates, if it does not actually constitute development."[4] Clearly marked is the decline of old Mrs. Sedley, "who in the days of her success was a cheerful wife and mother, decays gradually into a querulous old woman, jealous of her daughter, Amelia ..... indulging to the end of her life in petty recriminations."[5]

The themes of Thackeray's novels are concerned with Vanity Fair. In Vanity Fair, he painted a panorama of human

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[2]John W. Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 124-125.

[3]Cecil, op. cit., p. 87.

[4]Dodds, op. cit., p. 125.

[5]Ibid., p. 126.

life; in Pendennis, he traces the life of a young man and the vanity that is seen in his life; and in Henry Esmond, he reveals the vanity seen in the life of the past. This vanity is seen in the lives of the families of city merchants, the families of country clergy, and the families of the fashionable members of society.[6]

One great innovation which Thackeray was able to contribute to the English Novel was the developing of an organic unity of the large scale English Novel. Unlike Dickens and Fielding who combined a variety of people and incidents and linked them with a central figure, although having no intrinsic connection with each other, Thackeray makes the variety the subject; for all its manifestations are different illustrations of those laws of human conduct which it is his object to portray."[7] There is no character through whose eyes the story should be seen and with whose point of view one should sympathize. Therefore, there are no heroines; each female is a slave to circumstance. To illustrate this point, Thackeray contrasts two female characters in Vanity Fair, Amelia Sedley and Rebecca Sharp. Rebecca begins her life as a Bohemian; she surmounts the social barriers and lives as an aristocrat; finally, however, as the story ends, Rebecca has descended to a middle class social status. Amelia's

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[6]Cecil, op. cit., p. 85.

[7]Ibid., p. 92.

career follows a contrary curve. When Rebecca is at her highest point, Amelia is at her lowest, and as Rebecca descends, Amelia once more rises. Each becomes a middle class woman as the story ends. Each of the characters reveals herself to be in some degree a victim of her own or of other peoples' deceptions. Finally Thackeray writes:

> Which of us is happy in this world: Which of us has his desire? Or having it, is satisfied -- Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.[8]

Thackeray's story telling technique is unique. In Vanity Fair, he utilizes the method inaugurated by Fielding in which the author interrupts the story to make comments on what is taking place. Thackeray extends Fielding's method by telling the story as if he were sitting talking to his readers. In Pendennis and Henry Esmond, he partly identifies himself with the character; therefore, the stories are told in retrospect.

Of Thackeray's dramatic technique, Beach says that Thackeray's great scenes are done in such an episodic manner there seems to exist an instance of non-dramatic technique; however, he continues:

> ..... there is a dramatic element of Thackeray's narrative. This is found in bits of dialogue that spring up along the way and have the air of being

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[8]William M. Thackeray, Vanity Fair: A Novel Without A Hero (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 730.

> not so much the substance of the story as incidental illustration of the theme.[9]

His method of describing scene and character is an achievement that lies in its truthfulness to recognizable reality. He does not attempt to reproduce with photographic accuracy all the facts that make up a scene, but he selects from those he thinks most significant. Cecil remarks of this selective art, "In the visible as much as in the moral world, he accentuates the traits which in his view gives his model its individuality, heightens the lights darkens the shadows."[10]

Thackeray's style is eloquent. "It has precision and felicity of the real stylist, the vigilant sense of words that makes the most trifling page living and significant", writes Cecil.[11] On this point, Wagenknecht agrees by saying, "It is almost universally recognized as having combined fine elegance with colloquial ease."[12] Thus one sees that Thackeray possesses many attributes of an artist of fiction; however, his weaknesses and inconsistences leave him open to much criticism.

Although critics complain that Thackeray's plots are loosely constructed, and that his themes are all concerned with his disdain for vanities, one of his most glaring weaknesses

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[9]Joseph W. Beach, "Thackeray Full Length", Virginia Quarterly Review, Vol. XXII, 1946, p. 280.

[10]Cecil, op. cit., p. 96.

[11]Ibid., p. 98.

[12]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), p. 283.

in his avoidance of the discussion of sexual irregularity. Thackeray's "bad" women, Beatrix and Blanche, although possessing the characteristics of women of pleasure, hard hearted, but of fiery sensual temperament "are represented as cold as stones", writes Cecil.[13]

A complaint made against Thackeray's treatment of his "good" women is that he praises them and extolls their virtues when he introduces them to the readers, yet later, when he depicts them in action, his mood seems to change and "with ruthless penetration he exposes the meanness and vanity which underlie much of their seeming goodness", while the opposite is true of his bad women.[14] His "bad" women are often truer than the good, and as a result, the readers often like the bad ones as much as the good. Some people like them even better.

Joseph Warren Beach in writing of Vanity Fair, Thackeray's first long novel which he originally planned as "Pen and Pencil Sketches of Society", but whose scope was so great that the sketches were combined to make a novel, says, "Of all novelists, Thackeray gives us the most full-bodied representation of what Gertrude Stein has called the

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[13]Cecil, op. cit., p. 107.

[14]Ibid., p. 107.

daily island life of the English."[15]

Opposite female characters are pitted against each other in the story and from this point forward life is a battle. The center of the battle may be in the families of the characters where there are jealousies and dissensions or it may be in the world outside between the honest and the dishonest, the moral and the vicious, the sensual, the depraved, the decent people and the rogues. Selfishness and hypocrisy are the foe.[16]

To narrate the story, Thackeray assumed the position of the omniscient author who prides himself on being the most unabashed of showmen and who usurps the creators privilege of intruding on the scene to comment on his own creations.[17] Thackeray says of this approach he has adapted,

> And as we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave as a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform and talk about them: if they are good and kindly to love them and shake them by the hand; if they are silly to laugh at them confidentially in the reader's sleeve; if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of.[18]

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[15]Beach, op. cit., p. 280.

[16]Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel "The Age of Dickens and Thackeray" Vol. VII (London: H. F. and G. Witherby LTD, 1936), p. 378.

[17]Edgar Pehlam, The Art of the Novel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 104.

[18]Vanity Fair, p. 79.

Thackeray's method thus stated he had the privilege of sharing the innermost thoughts and feelings of his characters. Sometimes, however, of his characters, he pretended to be unable to know what they were doing, even going out of his way to validate their independent existence. As the omniscient author Thackeray writes,

> If a few pages back, the present writer claimed the privilege of peeping into Miss Amelia Sedley's bedroom and understanding with the omniscience of the novelist all the gentle pains and passions which were tossing upon that innocent pillow, why should he not declare to be Rebecca's confidante too, master of her secrets, and seal keeper of that young woman's conscience.[19]

And yet, Thackeray, the author stated, "The personage does or says something and I ask, how the dickens did he come to think of that?"[20]

In Vanity Fair, Thackeray talks directly to the readers about his female characters; he treats them as exhibits, patronizes them with characterizing epithets which are either sentimental, ironic, or descriptive. Beach censures Thackeray's exhibition of characters when he says,

> Thackeray is like a naturalist at the zoo introducing his favorite monkeys or the more curious specimens in the aquarium. Amelia is "our young lady" or "the poor child" or the silly "little thing". The references to

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[19] Ibid., p. 150.

[20] Lewis Melville, The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray Vol. I. (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1899), p. 16.

> Becky are almost always ironic--
> "our darling Rebecca", "poor dear
> Rebecca".[21]

Throughout Vanity Fair, Thackeray creates episodes that place his female characters in ironic situations or situations in which he can make ironic comments. This scene is characteristic of Thackeray's technique: Becky, after her marriage to Rawdon Crawley, entertained her brother-in-law, Sir Pitt Crawley. She gave him wine from Lord Steyne's cellar, made him comfortable before the fire, and let him talk as she listened with the "tenderest, kindly interest sitting beside him, and hemming a shirt for her dear little boy." Thackeray comments,

> Whenever Mrs. Rawdon wished to be
> particularly humble and virtuous, this
> little shirt used to come out of her
> work box. It had got to be too small
> for Fawdon long before it was finished.[22]

Another episode which reveals Thackeray's expert use of irony is the scene between Sir Pitt Crawley and Becky. Sir Pitt proposes to Becky, unaware of her secret marriage to his son. Sir Pitt pleads, "I say again, I want you .... Come as Lady Crawley, if you like .... Birth be hanged ....

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[21]Beach, op. cit., p. 150.

[22]Vanity Fair, Vol. II, p. 85.

[23]Ibid., p. 150.

Thackeray comments on the irony of this incident:

> What well bred young woman is there in all Vanity Fair who will not feel for a hard-working ingenious, meritorious girl who gets such an honorable offer, just at the time when it is out of her power to accept it.[24]

Rebecca, then, is a puppet in Thackeray's hands and after his expert manipulation of her into incidents and episodes, he satirizes her position with ironical comments. Even in the climax of the story which is a great dramatic scene, Thackeray does not permit Becky to enjoy her well planned evening with Lord Steyne, from whom she plans to secure additional funds and jewelry and under whose patronage, she can remain in the aristocratic circles of society. While Rawdon Crawley, Rebecca's husband is in jail for non-payment of debts, Rebecca entertains Lord Steyne in her house, Rawdon Crawley is released from jail, without the assistance of his wife to whom he had appealed for help. Upon entering the house unexpectedly, he is shocked to find his wife and Lord Steyne in a situation that is clearly compromising. Thackeray narrates this dramatic scene:

> Steyne was hanging over the sofa on which Becky sat. The wretched woman was in brilliant full toilette, her arms with bracelets and rings; and the brilliants on her breast which Steyne had given her. He had her hand in his, and was bowing over it to kiss it, when Becky started up with a faint scream as

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[24] Ibid., p. 150.

> she caught sight of Rawdon's face which caused Becky to fling herself before him. "I am innocent, Rawdon" she said; "before God I am innocent." "I am innocent, say I am innocent", she said to Lord Steyne.25

But Thackeray, the omniscient, encouraged Steyne to believe that the husband and wife were conspiring against him; therefore, Steyne's reply, "You innocent! Dam you ... Why every trinket you have on your body is paid for by me."[26] Thus, Steyne, the aristocrat was vindicated, but Mrs. Rebecca Crawley began to drift back to her original social status, that of a Bohemian.

Although many critics have considered Thackeray's treatment cruel, many agree with William Dean Howells that Becky's characterization is practically flawless.

Howells writes:

> I suppose primacy among Thackeray's women, good, bad and indifferent, would be awarded to Becky Sharp, by nine-tenths of his critics, and one cannot deny her a high degree of wicked perfection.[27]

Of her charm, Dodds says:

> From the time she throws the copy of Johnson's dictionary out of the carriage in the direction of Miss Pinkerton, she fixes the reader

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[25] Ibid., p. 554.

[26] Ibid., p. 554.

[27] William Dean Howells, Heroines of Fiction, Vol. I. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1901), p. 192.

with her glittering green eye and
he remains under her spell.[28]

Not only do the readers fall under Becky's spell, but all other characters with whom she comes in contact. Thackeray permits Becky to move through the English "Mayfair" acting as a catalytic agent upon others. All capitulate, in their various ways to her charm. Her conquest of a reluctant society is achieved by the exercise of her personal attractions and ready wit. In spite of Becky's weaknesses, she is not malicious and she can be good when there is nothing to lose. Therefore, when Amelia is pining for her unfaithful husband, George, Rebecca throws into Amelia's lap the billet put into her bouquet years ago by Amelia's flirtatious husband.

Opposite Becky, Thackeray places Amelia Sedley, the amiable, simple, modest creature whom he knew would be a pawn in Rebecca's hands. Amelia has less than the average amount of intellect; she would cry over a dead canary, and the virtues that she possesses are mainly negative. Thackeray was quite aware of Amelia's selfishness. In a letter to his mother, he wrote, "Don't you see how odious all the people are in the book (with the exception of Dobbin), behind all of which there is a dark moral, I hope."[29] Thackeray further stated that he endowed

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[28]Dodds, op. cit., p. 131.

[29]Gordon N. Ray, ed. Vol. II, The Letters of William Makepeace Thackeray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 309.

Amelia with one virtue above most people and that virtue was love, by which she would be saved. However, her particular variety of love was not enough to save her; for her love-in-grief deceived her.

Pendennis (1848-1850) is considered an autobiographical novel. The story is a biography of Arthur Pendennis, written in the third person by himself. So nearly parallel is the early life of Pendennis to that of the author's life, that "no one can be sure just where the fictional and the creative is superimposed upon the reminiscent."[30]

Thackeray's method of telling his story is stated in the preface of the novel: "It is a sort of confidential talk between writer and reader which must often be dull, must often flag."[31] His original plan, says Thackeray, was an exciting one of ruffians, convicts, and goal-birds, "but to describe a rascal", Thackeray writes, "you must make him so horrible that he would be too hideous to show; and unless the painter paints him fairly, I hold he has no right to show him at all."[32]

Pendennis is the story of a young Englishman whose greatest enemy is himself. He is careless, quite satisfied with himself and the world; he runs out of one escapade into another with the assurance that all will come right in the end.

30Dodds, op. cit., p. 144.

31Pendennis, p. 17.

32Ibid., p. 28.

Pen is fully aware that, in the event of misfortune, he has his mother's and cousin's affection to draw upon. The theme of the indulgent mother is clearly emphasized in Pen's life. When Pen forms an attachment for an actress ten years his senior and his uncle, Major Pendennis is called upon for counsel, Major Pendennis groaned, "The mother has spoiled the young rascal."[33] Later Thackeray expresses a similar opinion, "This unfortunate supersition and idol-worship of this good woman was the cause of a great deal of the misfortune which befell this young gentleman who is the hero in our history."[34] George Warrington, too, thinks Pen has been "bred up as, a molly-coddle and spoilt by women."[35] Thackeray infers that Pen's susceptibility to the influences of women is partly responsible for his selfishness. He then makes Helen influential in all of Pen's affairs. She wanted to spoil her boy, but she knows what is good for him; therefore, in each of his escapades, she runs to the rescue. She has plans made for him to marry Laura, his stepsister but Laura refuses Pen when he tells her that he only plans to marry her because of his mother's wishes. Helen is tolerant of Laura's contempt for Pen's airs and egotism but she found it hard to forgive her for refusing him.

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[33]William Makepeace Thackeray, The History of Pendennis (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1910), p. 5.

[34]Ibid., p. 5.

Thackeray states, ... "and Helen, who could pardon almost everything could not pardon an act of justice in Laura."[36]

Laura Pendennis plays a thankless role in Pen's life. Although Helen's desire is for a marriage between Laura and Pen, and Laura loves both dearly, she has the courage to refuse Pen's offer. Pen admits that his purpose in proposing was to "make our mother happy."[37] Laura understood Pen's weakness; she was often angry with him for his extravagance and laziness, but she loved him in spite of that. Thackeray permitted Laura to wait the length of two volumes and finally after Helen's death, married Laura to Pen. Thackeray, probably realizing his characterization of Pen and the probable doubts of the readers concerning this match states,

> And what sort of husband would this Pendennis be? Many a reader will ask, doubting the happiness of such a marriage and the fortune of Laura. The querists, if they meet her, are referred to that lady herself, who, seeing his faults and wayward moods seeing and owing that there are better men than he, loves him always with the most constant affection.[38]

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[36] Ibid., p. 316.

[37] Ibid., p. 279.

[38] Ibid., p. 394.

Thackeray's marriage of Pen to Laura represents the triumph of the unworldly impulses over the worldly as represented on the cover of the novel. On the cover, Thackeray placed the home, a young woman, and children one side and the world, a siren, and a imp on the other. One imp was offering the toys of wealth to the young man, Pendennis. His refusal to accept the wealth symbolizes the triumph of the good.

Henry Esmond (1852) is an historical novel. It is the first of Thackeray's long novels not published in serial form. Wagenknecht divides the background of Esmond into three divisions: military campaigns on the continent; Jacobite plots in England in behalf of the Old Pretender; the social and literary life of Queen Anne's London.[39] Dodds writes, "In the larger sense Esmond does recapture the tone of a whole period," although Thackeray rearranges history for his own purposes and sometimes even distorts it.[40]

The story is told by the aged Esmond, in the third person mainly, which Dodds calls the "retrospective method of story telling."[41] The story as told by Esmond is one of the memory

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[39]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949), 275.

[40]Dodds, op. cit., p. 162.

[41]Ibid., p. 160.

of his youthful days which fixes the mood of gentle melancholy.[42] The nucleus of the story is Esmond's sacrifice of his own claims in favor of the family who had befriended him. His reward is the hand of his kinswoman, the lovely Countess of Castlewood, somewhat his elder, who gradually passes from the maternal role to that of spouse, but always under the specification of his "dear old lady."[43]

Evident in Henry Esmond is Thackeray's skillful use of imagery in the treatment of female characters. His descriptive technique brings forth in one passage the visual and the olfactory images in Esmond's picture of Lady Viscountess Castlewood:

> She wore a dress of black velvet, and a petticoat of flame, colored brocade with great gold clocks to her stockings and white pantoties with red heels; and the odor of musk was shook out of her garments whenever she moved.[44]

Thackeray's use of the dramatic technique comes into view in the first few chapters of the story. Henry Esmond had been left an orphan by the former Castlewood family; the new Lord and Lady of Castlewood adopted him but Henry was too

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[42] Ibid., p. 163.

[43] Beach, op. cit., p. 295.

[44] William Makepeace Thackeray, The History of Henry Esmond (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, N. D.), p. 87.

young to understand the political crisis that existed in which the family was involved. When he was old enough to understand that his benefactors of the Roman Catholic faith were practically prisoners in their own home, Lady Castlewood reveals the situation to Esmond in this dramatic scene:

> "We are prisoners" ... "in everything but chains we are prisoners. Let them come, let them consign me to dungeons or strike off my head from this poor little throat, (and she clasped it in her long fingers) ..... Let the tyrants of Orange bring his rack and his odious Dutch tortues -- the beast! the wretch. I spit upon him and defy him."[45]

Again Thackeray contrasts two leading female characters, Beatrix Esmond and Rachel, Lady Castlewood, Esmond. Lady Castlewood is considered one of Thackeray's "good" women, in whose care Esmond is placed as a small boy. Thackeray's characterization of her is most unique, in that, she is never directly seen, but is revealed through the eyes of Esmond:

> There seemed, as the boy thought in every look and gesture of this fair creature, an angelical softness and bright pity -- in motion or repose, she seemed gracious alike; the tone of her voice, though she uttered words ever so trivial, gave him pleasure that amounted almost to anguish.[46]

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[45] Ibid., p. 81.

[46] Ibid., p. 104.

Later after Esmond grows up, visits an ale house, and returns with the smallpox, Thackeray steps in and reveals Lady Castlewood's complete change of personality and haughty character in this tirade:

> ..... she who had never uttered a syllable of unkindness to the lad Esmond, cried out, Why was he brought here to disgrace our house? Why is he here? Let him go, let him go, I say, tonight, and pollute the place no more.[47]

Lady Castlewood is again cruel to Esmond when her husband is slain in a duel. Although Esmond is wounded while attempting to protect Lord Castlewood, Lady Castlewood accuses Esmond, "You have only brought grief and sorrow; and repentance, bitter, bitter repentance, as return for our love and kindness."[48] Finally after many such exhibitions of cruelty towards Esmond and jealousy towards her daughter, she repents, marries Esmond, retires to a Virginia estate and lives happily.

For the characterization of Lady Castlewood, Thackeray has been severly criticized. William Dean Howells denounces Thackeray, not for the impossibility of the characterization, but for the improbability of it. Howells writes, "I say the thing is possible, but it is so ugly, so out of nature, that it is less than revolting."[49]

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[47] Ibid., p. 117.

[48] Ibid., p. 209.

[49] Howells, op. cit., p. 205.

"Beatrix Esmond has sometimes been called the most elaborately portrayed woman in English Fiction."[50] Beatrix is never seen directly but always through the eyes of Henry Esmond whose heart becomes enslaved to her and for years, he begs her love in vain. Beatrix recognized Esmond's love for her and she did not hesitate to enchant him deliberately. Thackeray charmingly permits her to tease him with the following question:

> Do I look very wicked cousin?
> Turning the full round on Esmond,
> with her pretty face so close under
> his chin that the soft perfumed
> hair touched it. She laid her fin-
> gertips on his sleeve as she spoke;
> and he put his other hand over hers.[51]

Esmond knew that Beatrix was a flirt. "She was imperious; she was light-minded; she was flighty; she was false; she had no reverence in her character but he loved her. There might be better women, but he wanted that one."[52]

The proud girl's ambition proved to be her undoing as she had numerous suitors, but finally married the rector's son. Her first engagement was to a Lord, but the marriage did not materialize. She was then engaged to a duke, who was killed by

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[50]Edward Wagenknecht, College English, Vol. IV, "The Selfish Heroine", February, 1943, p. 293.

[51]Henry Esmond, p. 269.

[52]Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 293.

the same sword that killed her father. She then cast her eyes upon the Prince, who had come to claim the throne after the death of Queen Anne. As a measure of protection for the Prince whose looks betrayed his interest in Beatrix, she was sent away. But when the psychological moment arrived for the Prince to appear at the castle to claim the throne, he had then gone to find Beatrix; thereby, losing his claim to the throne; thus, Beatrix lost her opportunity to claim a king and a title. "This marks the break between Beatrix and her old life, and it cured Esmond of the long disease of his love for her."[53]

53Ibid., p. 295.

CHAPTER IV

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THACKERAY'S TREATMENT OF FEMALE CHARACTERS

The biographical factors of Thackeray's life attest to the influences of his immediate environment created by his family and his friends. The person with whom Thackeray was most intimate during much of his life was a woman, his mother. To her he expressed his innermost desires; revealed his most confidential secrets; and related his many disillusionments. He loved his mother and spent many of the early years of his life attempting to please her. He lavished the sum of his childish affections upon her. "She created in the heart of an impressionable child an ideal of womanhood which was never supplanted."[1]

Isabella Shawe, Thackeray's wife had a dual influence upon his life. First, she enhanced his love for women because of his love for her and secondly, her insanity and the breaking up of his home seemed to have "intensified in him a gentle melancholy."[2] Disillusionment was a part of

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[1]Malcolm Elwin, Thackeray, A personality (London: Johnathan Cape, 1932), p. 24.

[2]John W. Dodds, Thackeray, A Critical Portrait (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 57.

Thackeray's temperament from his early life and the tragedy of his home stamped the mood upon him.

The Brookfield affair, too, added to Thackeray's depression of spirits. "I cannot live without the tenderness of some woman", he wrote to Mrs. Brookfield during the first visit to America.[3] When Brookfield became jealous of Thackeray's attentions to his wife, Thackeray stated, "Her innocence, looks, angelical sweetness, and kindness ravish me to the highest degree." However, he related that all things beautiful, "children, landscapes, harmonies of color, music" affected him in the same way.[4] The breach that came between Thackeray and the Brookfields was just one of the series of his many disappointments.

Cambridge, that gentlemen's world, fixed his social status, although later adversity forced him to associate with Bohemians and other strange acquaintances. "He was never a Bohemian and was always faithful to the traditions of the class in which he was born and bred."[5] While at Cambridge, Thackeray contributed a poem, "Timbuctoo" to a weekly periodical called The Snob; his classmates were unaware that he was the author, but he

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[3] Ibid., p. 139.

[4] Ibid., p. 139.

[5] Lewis Melville, The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1899), p. 53.

listened to their praise of the contribution. Dodds states that Thackeray, in a letter to his mother wrote, "The men knew not the author, but praised the poem; how eagerly I sucked it in! All is vanity."[6] This theme which is found in much of Thackeray's writings seems to have come from his self-examination and confession that he, too, liked praise. Therefore, when he probed into the weaknesses and follies of others, he tempered his writings with an understanding of human frailty.[7]

Thackeray's early literary apprenticeship was that of a critic and satirist. Thackeray criticized the sentimental writings of Bulwer Lytton; he reviewed Disrealis fashionable novels and called them absurd. Here while writing critical reviews, Thackeray began working out his philosophy of the literary profession. He believed that all literary men were writing for money; therefore, seeking literary reputations were not important; so, why not tell the truth and reap the profit instead of worrying about the art and genius of other writers.

After Thackeray's reviews, he began writing satires called The Yellowplush Papers in which he satirized fashionable affections, and shams. He seems to have been fascinated by the spectacle of fools and knaves. Throughout Thackeray's earlier

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[6]Dodds, op. cit., p. 7.

[7]Dodds, op. cit., p. 7.

writings, he proves to be a satirist, a humorist, and sometimes a serious literary man focusing his vision on the social scene pointing out the pretensions that thrive there.[8] Thackeray's biography shows that he loved women; he disliked pretensions, affectations, and shams. His literary philosophy was that of a realist, who believed literature should be truthful even if in a satirical vein.

Thackeray, at a mid-point in his career added another element to his literary contributions, the moral element. While writing for Punch, one of his most characteristic pieces was an essay, "A Little Dinner at Timmins's". In this essay, Thackeray attached a moral concerning "the absurdity of living beyond your means in order to make a social impression."[9] Later in his writings, he expressed a humanitarian point of view in Punch. Dodds quotes from Thackeray's essay, "Writing at the Station" in which Thackeray denounces the pride of the upper classes who neglect the poverty and misery of the poor. Later, says Dodds, Thackeray wrote:

> The object of life as I take it, is to be friendly with everybody ... as there is, if one would or could but discover it, something notable, something worthy or observation, of sympathy, of wonder and amusement, in

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[8] Ibid., pp. 36-44.

[9] Ibid., p. 91.

in every fellow mortal.[10]

When Thackeray began writing his longer works of fiction, he had established himself as a critic of manners of the contemporary English society. The view on which his eyes were focused was slightly disturbing as snobbishness "had appeared in an exaggerated form and assumed the proportions of an epidemic."[11] This alarming prevalence of snobbishness was the result of the Industrial Revolution which had made drastic changes in the once rigid class system; thereby causing attention to be focused on the newly rich females who were envying and emulating their superiors. The changes made in industry and agriculture gave rise to a powerful middle class society who saw in the upper classes their ideal of manners, dress and entertainment.

The term "industrial revolution" usually reminds one of the mechanization of industry which reached an unprecedented growth during the latter half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century; however, the social aspects and their influences upon the middle class females are more significant in a consideration of Thackeray and his female

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[10] Ibid., p. 94.

[11] Ernest Baker, The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray, Vol. VII (London: H. F. and G. Witherby LTD., 1936), p. 356.

characters.

With the mechanization of industry there came an acceleration of social and economic life. The industrialists, merchants, gentry, and tradesmen made tremendous financial gains. The men of the nobility, too profited. To exhibit their wealth, the men of the nobility erected magnificient town and country houses. Their wives selected furniture made by master furniture makers and designers: Chippendale, Sheraton, Hepplewhite and brothers, Adam; their homes were decorated with portraits by Reynolds and Gainsborough. Many a lordly mansion enjoyed an almost international fame for the fountains, summer houses, beautiful parks with trees, shrubs, walks, and for the art treasures of its magnificient rooms and galleries.[12]

"Among the country gentlemen there was an improvement in manners and an attempt to ape the fashions of the nobility.[13] They spent much time in London, bought fashionable clothes and began to read books. Their wives were no longer content to remain at home and fill their former positions, "preparing cordial waters, curing marigolds, and making cherry brandy,

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[12]Frederick C. Dietz, Political and Social History of England (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), pp. 438.

[13]Ibid., p. 438.

salves, ointments and purges for the poor."[14] But they left the country and went up to London to join in the festivities where "theater-going, card-playing, and sports of all kinds were revived."[15]

Among the tradesmen in the towns, the increase of luxury and refinement was still more conspicious than among the gentry. At the beginning of the century, frugality was the rule of his household but during the reign of George III, it may be said for the tradesman:

> ..... he spent two or three months every summer at Margate or Brighton, his wife and daughters dressed like the gentry, a footman stood behind his table and he entertained his friends at dinner with maderia and claret.[16]

Many of the women of the upper-middle class were more interested in adorning themselves than in receiving education. Education in the early part of the century was a luxury for the few. However, as the century progressed, much interest was focused on education; with the result that boarding schools were organized for young ladies. They were profit-making organizations and the teachers had very few if any qualifications for the jobs.

> Frequently a sharp but poor pupil was glad enough to get her fees remitted in return for helping with the business of teaching, a fate which Becky Sharp

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[14] Ibid., p. 438.

[15] M. Phillips and W. S. Thompkinson, English Women in Life and Letters (London: Humphrey Milford Company, 1927), p. 100.

[16] Ibid., p. 439.

suffered in Vanity Fair.[17]

These young ladies received instruction in music, dancing, and the art of becoming fashionable hostesses. Phillips writes:

> When the young lady finished she could execute a few old airs upon the spinet, dance a minuet, or later on the waltz, and possibly sing one or two songs from the foreign operas which were just now becoming fashionable in England.[18]

At sixteen the young lady made her debut into the social world, attending masquerades and balls, and engaging in her most important activity, husband hunting. "Bath commenced her education proper, Ranelagh and Vauxhall finished it."[19]

In consequence of this new found wealth and great acceleration of social and economic life, "which had brought all sorts of rich upstarts to the top"[20], the paradoxial situations and the freaks of conduct and demeanour which resulted were met with Thackeray's ridicule.

"An excessive sensibility, or capacity for fine feelings and emotions is a marked characteristic of Thackeray."[21] He was offended by the affectations, shams and hypocrises of the women he observed. However, before he began his publications,

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[17] Ibid., p. 171.

[18] Ibid., p. 195.

[19] Ibid., p. 196.

[20] Baker, op. cit., p. 356.

[21] William J. Long, English Literature (New York: Ginn and Company, 1919), p. 503.

another important factor had to be considered. The mechanization of industry had eliminated much of the work done by women in their homes and with this increased amount of leisure time, women comprised a major part of the reading public for whom his works would be written.

On this middle class group of women, Puritanism had a strong and increasing hold. The Puritan ideal was fundamentally moral and claimed and exercised authority over standards of morals and manners. It exercised itself quietly, not in legislative form but through social pressure and public opinion. It silently controlled the news and comments in newspapers and periodicals, the fiction that could be read and therefore the kind of books and magazines that could be published. Queen Victoria and her Lutheran husband, Prince Albert sanctioned this limited view of life.[22] Therefore, Thackeray's writing during this Victorian Period reflects this attitude in his treatment of female characters.

The history of the eighteenth century furnished the atmosphere and the mood for the characterizations of the female characters in Henry Esmond. Thackeray was able to produce through these characters the manners and the social and political

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[22]J. W. Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), p. 4.

atmosphere of the period. Through their activities, Thackeray points up the war of the Spanish succession and the problem of the English succession.

In treating his female characters, Thackeray seems to have been divided between a deeply set worship of womanhood as an ideal, and a critical inability to see things as they are. All things gentle and soft and honorable sppealed to him; yet he knew that lovely women could stoop to the most banal follies. So realistically were his female characters drawn that his associates attempted to identify them within their immediate social groups.[23]

Thackeray's view of the women about him, and especially, the newly rich reveals that Vanity Fair is a "commentary, not on society as a whole but only certain aspects of it."[24] Therefore, when Thackeray wrote Vanity Fair, he pitted snobbism against snobbism, pride against pride, or other combinations in which meanness is suddenly exposed or worldiness becomes its own victim.[25]

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[23]Dodds, op cit., p. 129.

[24]Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era (Cambridge: University Press, 1940), p. 697.

[25]Joseph Warren Beach, "Thackeray Full Length" Virginia Quarterly Review, Vol. 22, 1946, p. 292.

Thackeray was a realist "but he lived in a literary time when it was all but impossible for one to be directly true."[26] Thus, when he discussed subjects that were not acceptable in the Victorian home, he brought the truth out circuitously. The evidence as seen in Vanity Fair is that Thackeray was able to leave the implication of Rebecca's guilt during the Lord Steyne affair. Thackeray asks:

> Was she guilty or not? She said not; but who could tell what was truth which came from those lips; or if that corrput heart was in this case pure.[27]

One does not feel that Thackeray avoided the question of sex as some critics have said. When he wished to discuss Rebecca's history while she was adventuring on the continent after the Lord Steyne affair, Thackeray implies what the drift of the story might have been by saying:

> We must pass over a part of Mrs. Rebecca Crawley's biography with that lightness and delicacy which the world demands -- the moral world, that has perhaps, no particular objection to vice, but an inseparable repugnance to hearing vice called by its proper name -- in describing this syren singing, smiling, cajoling, the author with modest pride asks his readers all round, has he once forgotten the laws of politeness....[28]

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[26]William D. Howells, Heroines of Fiction (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1901), p. 191.

[27]William M. Thackeray, Vanity Fair A Novel Without A Hero (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 356.

[28]Ibid., p. 671.

Thackeray includes episodes centering around the Battle of Waterloo in Vanity Fair. But the importance of the historical influence on the female characters is not in the battle itself but in its effect on them. The story is followed not in the thought of Napoleon but in the calculations of Becky Sharp who immediately begins to make plans to ensnare Jas Sedley as her husband goes off to battle.

Poor Dear Amelia, however, has forgotten Rebecca, jealousy, everything as she was on her knees praying for George when "No more firing was heard at Brussels -- the pursuit rolled away."[29] Geroge was lying on his face dead with a bullet through his heart.

To show the indifference of an old worlding to the national crisis, Thackeray transports his readers to England to look in on old Mrs. Crawley to whom the war was forgotton because she was "living at Brighton very moderately moved by the great events that were taking place."[30]

To Thackeray, Vanity Fair was not a satire of women, but an expression of his distaste for heroic characters and the vanities of a pretenious people.

In Pendennis as in Vanity Fair, the influences of Thackeray's immediate environment becomes apparent. Gordon N. Ray and John W. Dodds agree that Thackeray's mother was the model

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[29] Ibid., p.32.
[30] Ibid., p. 32.

for the character, Helen Pendennis. In his characterization of Blanche Amory, Thackeray, in a letter to Mrs. Brookfield describes a Blanche whom he knew and he points out the fact that she is to be included in the novel, Pendennis. He writes,

> At the train whom do you think I found? Miss Gore, who says she is Blanche Amory, and I think she is Blanche Amory, amiable at times, amusing, clever and depraved ... I will make Pendennis and Blanche play at being in love, such a wicked false, humbugging London love, as two blase London people might act, and half deceive themselves that they were in earnest.[31]

The pressure of the Victorian Period is greater in Pendennis than in Vanity Fair. In Pendennis, Thackeray attempted to portray a man passing through a series of temptations, but Thackeray's desire for fidelity in characterization was hampered by the prejudices of the reading public, whose taboos were inflexible. Thackeray says,

> Even the gentlemen of our age -- this is an attempt to describe one of them, no better than nor worse than most educated men -- even these we cannot show as they are with the notorious forcibles and selfishness of their lives and their education.[32]

Thackeray further states that his purpose was to describe a young man resisting and affected by temptation, but many ladies

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[31]William Makepeace Thackeray, A Collection of Letters (1847-1855) (London: Smith and Elder, 1887), p. 45.

[32]William Makepeace Thackeray, The History of Pendennis (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, LTD, 1910), p. 13.

remonstrated and many of his subscribers had left him because of his description. Thackeray infers that he had reconciled himself to the Victorian conventions on the discussion of women, but was unaware that these restrictions prevented his description of a man. Some compromise, then was inevitable if Pendennis were to be received in the Victorian home; therefore, Thackeray partially conformed. However, his female characters reflect his double vision. "It was supposed to be one of the conventions of the time that the Victorian woman should not be too intelligent."[33] The home was her boundary and giving birth to children her yearly occupation. On the basis of this description, Thackeray's Blanche Amory, who has often been compared with Becky, Miss Fatheringay with the arms of a Venus, Fanny Bolton, the congenital coquette will not measure up to the Victorian ideal. Laura Pendennis, however, is another Amelia and possibly might qualify.

Henry Esmond (1852). Before writing Henry Esmond, Thackeray had saturated himself in the history as well as the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He chose a subject in a new field and adopted a new manner. The subject chosen was history. In this novel, he attempted to accurately portray the life and manners of the Age of Anne. Thackeray was more concerned to reproduce, by reference to the fortunes of a particular family, the social and political atmosphere of the day.

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[33]Dodds, op. cit., p. 155.

The female characters were realistically portrayed in the light of the manners of the day as upper class women in the time of Anne were proud to be considered fashionable. They loved their brilliant jewels and pedigreed dogs; they rode in sedan chairs and traveled with a convoy of servants.

Although satire does not play a great part in Henry Esmond, in Lady Viscountess Castlewood, Thackeray satirizes the dress, manners, and vanities of the old upper class women who thought card-playing elaborate jewelry, lap dogs, a convoy of servants and being fashionable were marks of distinction.

Henry Esmond begins at the time that James II, the last of the Stuarts to hold the throne, was rapidly losing prestige. The son of Viscount Castlewood, Henry Esmond, is residing at Castlewood's house. Lady Castlewood, once a great beauty and favorite at Court is desperately trying to conceal her wrinkles with cosmetics. "Her face was daubed with white and red up to her eyes."[34] She wore false curls and on her fingers she had as many rings as the old woman of Banbury Cross. Thackeray, the satirist, even in a serious novel of history included his satirical vein. However, Thackeray believed that history had too long been concerned with the affairs of kings.

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[34]William Makepeace Thackeray, Henry Esmond (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell N. D.), p. 61.

"In a word", he writes, "I would have history familiar rather than heroic."[35] He also stated that Mr. Hogarth and Mr. Fielding will give future generations a better idea of the manners of the present age in England. Therefore, he, in his History of Henry Esmond included many of the manners of the English women. In this passage he again satirizes Lady Viscountess Castlewood as she made her entrance into Castlewood village:

> My Lady meant to have a triumphal entry into Castlewood village, and expected the people to cheer as she drove over the green in her great coach, my Lord beside her, her gentlemen, lap dogs, and cockatoos on the opposite seat, six horses to her carriage, and servants armed and mounted following and preceding it.[36]

The inconsistency in Thackeray's portrayal of Rachel Esmond, the devoted mother who married her son and the mother who promoted Esmond's love for her daughter while admitting that, "O Henry, she will make no man happy who loves her"[37] is accounted for by John W. Dodds in this way. Dodds says that because of Thackeray's unsettled personal life, he was unable to disassociate Rachel Castlewood from Jane Brookfield when he wrote the exalted passage of adoration. "Thackeray's correspondence at that time echoes the same intense and worshipful tones found in Esmond."[38]

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[36] Ibid., p. 54.

[37] Ibid., p. 283.

[38] Dodds, op. cit., p. 155.

Even in writing a history, Thackeray could not escape from himself in his treatment of women, but the women were not meant to be heroic or historically important as the book itself was in the author's own words, "A book of cutthroat melancholy" suitable to his own state.[39]

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[39] John Bell Henneman, Introduction to the History of Henry Esmond (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. XVii.

IN SUMMARY

As a writer whose income came chiefly from the novels which he wrote, Thackeray of necessity had to adapt himself to certain nineteenth century standards of decorum in his treatment of female characters. If he wanted to sell his novels, he had to avoid offending his reading public. Yet, an author's treatment of his characters is governed by his philosophy of life and by other equally important factors.

Thackeray was not a cynic as many of his critics at one time believed, but he hated hypocrites and pretenders and on every level of society he saw civilization crowded with them. Especially was this true among middle class women.

Perhaps he had seen too many drawing rooms, traveled in too many places, and observed too many people to exclude them from his panoramic view.

Thackeray loved women, but in the treatment of his female characters, he did not set a woman on a pedestal and worship her, but he exposed the good and bad found in each female portrayed. So realistically did he portray these women that even in the twentieth century, considerable interest has been shown and several studies have been made to determine

the source from which they were drawn. Thackeray, however, admitted that he never copied anyone, but on the other hand, he often referred to the similarity between his associates and his characters.

In describing his characters, Thackeray was sometimes a satirist to whom the peculiarities of conduct and manners were the target; at other times he was the realist whose accurate descriptions compelled his associates to search for prototypes. The women that Thackeray delineated were products of a middle class London society. This society was created by the Industrial Revolution which had greatly changed the English social structure by giving economic security to a large group of industrialists, capitalists, and gentry. The wives of these men became proud of their new found wealth; thereby, making spectacles of themselves in aping the manners, dress, and customs of the aristocracy.

Thackeray, being a realist and a satirist, showed great distaste for the affectations, shams, and hypocrices of these women and relentlessly exposed what he saw in the novels Vanity Fair and Pendennis. In Henry Esmond his attack was the same, the difference being the period of Queen Anne in which these same paradoxial situations existed.

To tell his stories Thackeray utilized divers methods of storytelling. In Vanity Fair he was the narrator and

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